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Homes to be tested for PCBs

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By SARAH GREENBLATT
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The interiors of South Plainfield homes adjacent to a federal Superfund site are scheduled to be tested Monday for the presence of polychlorinated biphenyls.

SOUTH PLAINFIELD

The federal Environmental Protection Agency will test dust samples from about a dozen homes on Spicer Avenue to measure the extent of PCB contamination that may have spread from the Hamilton In-

dustrial Park, which has been targeted for cleanup under the Superfund program.

Hazardous levels of PCBs have been found in soil samples from the industrial park, in the interiors of buildings on the property and in sediments taken from the Bound Brook, which crosses the 26-acre site.

The site, formerly owned by Cornell-Dubilier Electronics, is the property of D.S.C. of Newark Enterprises and houses about 15 businesses. Some 500 homes are located within a quarter-mile of the property, which

is on Hamilton Boulevard near Spicer Avenue.

PCBs are oily chemicals once used in manufacturing electronics components. Known to irritate the skin and cause kidney damage, the chemical is suspected of causing cancer and developmental disorders. The chemical can be absorbed through ingestion, inhalation or skin contact.

EPA site coordinator Eric Wilson said the agency has not yet received results of soil samples taken two weeks ago from the yards of 16 properties that

face Spicer Avenue. Most of those homeowners wanted to have the interiors of their houses tested as well, Wilson said.

Preliminary tests of soils on those properties revealed contamination levels well below federal standards, he said, adding that more extensive sampling was recently done to provide a more thorough picture of the problem. The results are not expected for a couple of months.

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The previous soil testing included one sample from each property, but the recent testing involved up to 20 samples from each yard.

EPA spokesman Rich Cahill said the agency is putting together an overall plan for evaluating contamination at the site in preparation for a long-term cleanup.

In the meantime, Wilson said, his

job is to identify and eliminate any immediate health hazards the site may pose to residents or workers. Federal officials have said the greatest risk is to longtime workers at the site, who may have been exposed to contaminants over periods of many years.

Wilson said plans for cleanup of contaminated businesses are under discussion among the agency, D.S.C. and Cornell-Dubilier.

Spicer Avenue resident Margaret Reidy said she has been reassured by

the speed and thoroughness of the EPA investigation.

"I think they're doing a good job with what they have to work with," Reidy said yesterday. "The rate at which they're going is acceptable. They don't seem to be dragging their heels in any way."

Spicer Avenue resident Rampaul Gopal said he is concerned about his family's health.

"I want to know if the contamination is any cause for alarm," he said.

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